



LEWIS & CLARK CITY-COUNTY Health Department

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Local Officials Release Plan to Improve Health of Entire County

Local health officials today released a community plan aimed at improving the health of all county residents. The plan focuses on five top health priorities: mental health, substance abuse, chronic disease, maternal and child health, and access to health care.

The "2013 Lewis and Clark County Health Improvement Plan" was produced by the Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department and St. Peter's Hospital. It addresses critically important health priorities as determined by a broad swath of community representatives from businesses, organizations, and government agencies.

The plan is available online at www.LewisandClarkHealth.org and www.stpetes.org/CHIP.

"The important thing about this plan is that it's a community plan, not a hospital or a health department plan," said Melanie Reynolds, county health officer and director of the local health department. "It represents the community's biggest concerns about health. All of us can play a role in implementing it, and all of us can benefit from it."

Nate Olson, president and CEO of St. Peter's, said working with other organizations in the community to address health-care needs is an important part of the not-for-profit hospital's mission.

"We are excited to work together with the County and other organizations to create innovative programs that address community-wide health issues," he said.

The long-term strategic plan has been nearly a year in the making. In the fall of 2012, St. Peter's Hospital conducted random telephone interviews with 400 residents to learn about their health status and needs. The hospital then convened a 17-member focus group to review the results of the survey and identify the health issues of greatest concern.

Meanwhile, the health department created a task force of more than 50 community members who met three times in late 2012 and early 2013. They, too, used the hospital data and the best available statistics compiled by the health department to pinpoint community health priorities.

In addition to establishing broad priorities, the task force members identified specific goals and strategies to improve health. Those goals were to:

- improve the use of the mental-health treatment system by reducing the stigma associated with mental illness;
- improve mental health through screening and early intervention;
- improve mental health by ensuring access to quality mental-health services;
- reduce substance abuse to protect the health, safety, and quality of life in the county;
- reduce incidences of chronic diseases (such as cancer, stroke, heart disease, and asthma);
- improve the health and well-being of women, infants, and children;
- prevent unintended pregnancies among adolescents; and
- improve access to health-care services.

The plan also includes steps individuals can take to improve their own and others' health.

“This plan won’t work unless the community embraces it and acts on it in a collective manner,” Reynolds said. “The health department and the hospital alone can’t make all this happen. It’s going to take the dedication and commitment of individuals, businesses, government, and community sectors.”

She said she hopes local groups will refer to the plan when setting their own goals and objectives.

“If we all chip away at these goals and strategies to the extent we’re able, we really can make some progress toward a healthier county,” Reynolds added.

The hospital and health department plan to convene their citizen representatives periodically to monitor progress on the plan’s recommendations.

Sidebar:

Public Invited to Comment on Health Plan

Lewis and Clark County residents are invited to comment on the newly released “2013 Lewis and Clark County Health Improvement Plan.”

It’s available online at www.LewisandClarkHealth.org and www.stpetes.org/CHIP. To request a printed copy, contact Gayle Shirley at the health department, 457-8908, or gshirley@lccountymt.gov.

People can submit comments by July 22 to healthinfo@lccountymt.gov or mail them to Lewis and Clark City-County Health Department (attn: Gayle Shirley), 1930 Ninth Ave., Helena MT 59601.